

June 7, 1961

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT
AND THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

June 6, 4:30 PM.

Present: The Vice President, Senators Mansfield, Humphrey, Russell, Fulbright, Dirksen, Saltonstall, Hickenlooper, Wiley The Speaker, Congressmen McCormack, Albert, Vinson, Morgan, Arends, Chipfield, Hoeven, Byrnes(Wisconsin)

I. General de Gaulle

The President opened the meeting by expressing appreciation to the Leadership, and explained that his object was to bring them up to date on the events of his trip to Europe. The President first discussed his meeting with de Gaulle. Although there was much discussion in the papers about trouble with the French, he found the differences of secondary importance compared to the agreement and to the common interest which he found between the United States and France, especially on policy toward Europe.

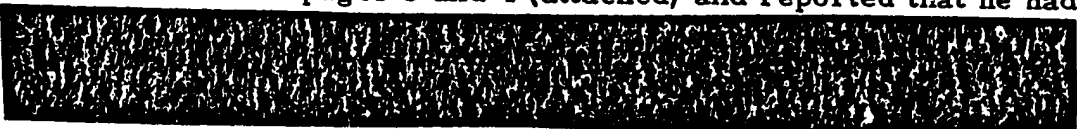
Disagreements had turned on two subjects -- NATO and de Gaulle's desire for a nuclear deterrent of his own. His grievances go back to World War II when he had difficulties with Churchill and Roosevelt, and the meeting was worth it in moderating this part of his attitude. Another element in his attitude was his resentment of the fact that nuclear help had been given by the United States to the United Kingdom and not to France. To these unexpressed grievances should be added his stated view that the whole position in Europe has changed since NATO was founded. Then there was a nuclear monopoly; now there is a nuclear balance. The United States could say that it was prepared to act by trading New York for Paris, but would we really do so? In addition, General de Gaulle was opposed to integration, which he thought ruined the morale of the armed forces and was one reason for the recent trouble with his generals in North Africa.

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Nevertheless, the General agreed to make no attack on NATO, now, although he will want to act later after the present Berlin crisis ends and after he gets his army back from Algeria. But he is alone in this posture toward NATO and his position does not bother the President much. Moreover, de Gaulle himself had said that what would settle the position in Europe was not what he, de Gaulle, said, but what happens in West Berlin.

The President reported general agreement with de Gaulle on Africa and Latin America. To a question from Senator Fulbright on Laos, he said that de Gaulle's position was good with respect to the present conference in Geneva and that he was prepared to go back into Laos, but not to take military action there. To a further questions, the President said that de Gaulle appeared to expect an Algerian agreement by the autumn, although other Frenchmen were not so optimistic. The General seemed to have no interest in a transfer of Polaris weapons to NATO since they would not reinforce French forces. He was for the alliance but against integration. He was agreeable and friendly in every way, although he treats the press as only Sam Rayburn does in Washington. The President read from his talking paper: most of items 1 - 11 on pages 3 and 4 (attached) and reported that he had



The President reported that the French seemed to him a long way from having a nuclear force of their own.

In response to a question from Senator Fulbright, the President indicated that in his judgment General de Gaulle does not really want the British in the Common Market. He appears to believe that they will not make the necessary political commitment, and in any case de Gaulle prefers the present situation in which he is the dominant figure.



The President said there had been no discussion of the test ban -- de Gaulle had not raise it and the President had followed the same

course because the prospects for the test ban seemed so dim at present.

II. Khrushchev

The President reported that the most important subject discussed on the first day had been Laos; that he and Khrushchev had agreed that Laos should be neutral in the same fashion as Cambodia and Burma, but that Khrushchev had not appeared really much interested in Laos. The most ominous discussion of the first day had been Khrushchev's doctrine of the three wars. In the President's judgment, Khrushchev now feels that there is a balance in the nuclear field which prevents us from using nuclear weapons for local purposes. He feels further that in local engagements the shorter lines of communication and the large manpower of the Sino-Soviet bloc will give it a decisive advantage -- whatever number of men we put in, they can put in several times as many. Moreover, Khrushchev insists upon the validity of his third kind of war, namely, the war of liberation, or sacred war.

Returning to Laos, the President said that there had been some language agreed on in the communique, and that perhaps something would come from it. He also expressed his view that Khrushchev was partly right in saying that not all weaknesses in governments and danger of Communist take-over could be attributed to the Communists themselves. The President reported that Khrushchev seemed uninterested in Cuba. Khrushchev said that Castro was not a Communist but we were making him one. The President reported Khrushchev's view that the present situation was like the period during the decline of feudalism and the rise of capitalism.

To a question from Senator Fulbright, the President replied that Khrushchev seemed rather bitter on Nasser and that he (the President) had written three letters to Nasser, which seemed to produce some improvement in Nasser's feeling toward the United States.

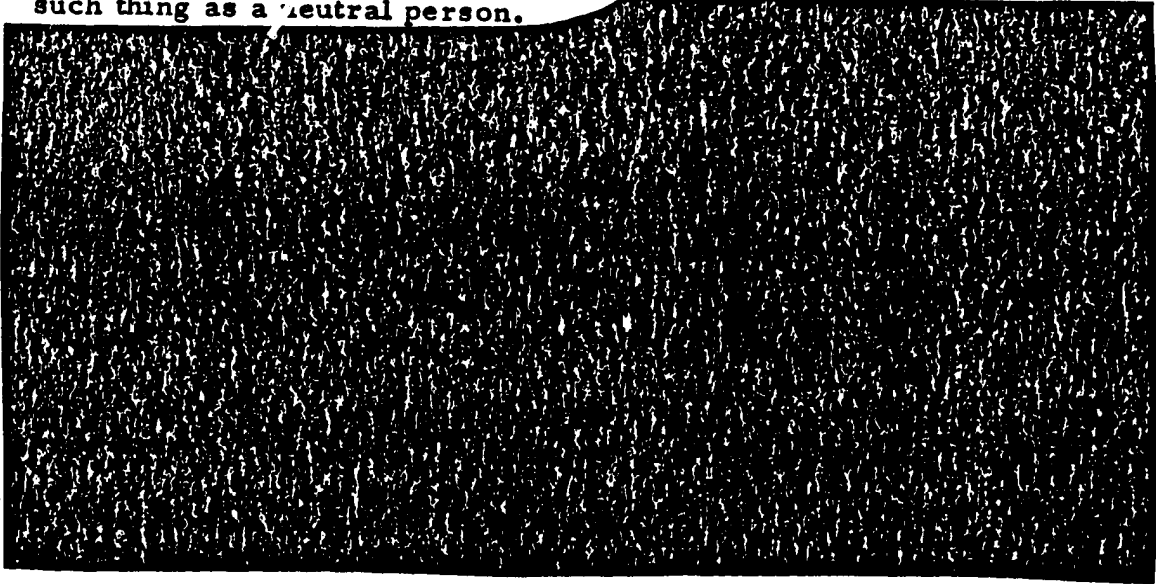
Senator Humphrey commented that perhaps we ought not to jump to the conclusion that all people of this sort are going Communist, and referred to the example of Qasim in Iraq. The President then read excerpts from the minutes of the conversation after lunch on Saturday, beginning on page 1 and continuing through page 3. (The President specifically omitted reference to his own remarks about the Cuban situation.)

Senator Dirksen asked whether there was discussion of CENTO, and the President said there was not, and repeated his view of the Soviet sense of a change in the power balance. The President then read a passage relating to the Soviet view of the sacred war and how the United States used to be in favor of such revolution but was not any longer.

Asked about the Congo, the President reported Khrushchev's statement that his experience in the Congo was what confirmed in him the necessity for the Troika. To a question from Senator Fulbright about arms limitation in Africa, the President replied that the matter had not been discussed. The President read from the memorandum of conversation to explain Mr. Khrushchev's remarks about Taiwan.

To a question from Senator Dirksen, the President commented that there had been only a brief reference to U. S. bases.

On Sunday the discussion began with nuclear testing and Mr. Khrushchev had insisted on the Troika, stating that there was no such thing as a neutral person.



[REDACTED]

Discussion then turned to Germany, which was what, in the President's judgment, Khrushchev had come to talk about. He gave us an aide memoire on Germany and it was on this subject, for the first time, that his voice began to rise. The President read at length from the memorandum of conversation to show Khrushchev's position on Germany and his own response. Senator Fulbright asked whether there was a time limit on these discussions, and the President replied, "He said December."

[REDACTED]

Senator Dirksen asked three questions: (1) What is Khrushchev's physical condition? The President said it was good. (2) Was there any other arrogance about him? The President said no. (3) Should we expect a recognition of East Germany before December? The President said that in his view there might well be a signing of a peace treaty at some such time, and that the Soviets would say that all rights reverted to the East Germans, although they might in fact not do anything to interfere with our access

[REDACTED]

And as far as military access was concerned, our own troops could be supplied with four air sorties a day. To the question whether Khrushchev had described the period of time for which the Free City would have the rights he offered, the President said that the answer was not clear.

The President then quoted again from the aide memoire to explain the Soviet proposal on a Free City, and also the Soviet view that a peace treaty would formally end occupation rights.

Senator Humphrey asked whether East Berlin had been mentioned. The President answered no.

Senator Humphrey commented further that the Soviet position seemed identical with what Khrushchev stated before, and the President commented that the only new point was the time limit. Senator Humphrey rejoined that even the time limit was not new, in the sense that there had been time limits before. The President stated that in his judgment Khrushchev was talking in cold terms of a genuinely vital present interest.

Senator Saltonstall asked whether Khrushchev seemed moved by fear of West Germany. The President answered that this was what Khrushchev said, but really he was interested in the build-up of East Germany.

In response to a question, the President said that Khrushchev claimed his relations with China were very good.

Senator Dirksen found four propositions in this report: (1) two Germanys, (2) Berlin in the middle of one of them, (3) concessions on troops and access, (4) in the future, when the sovereign power says that you have to take your troops home, you are sunk.

The President said that in his own speech that evening he would say the situation was serious, but not press it home too sharply. We shall soon send back an aide memoire on our own rights, and we must consider what else we can do.

Senator Russell said that at present he would be against an airlift. The President replied that we can decide when the time comes. The President further reported that after lunch on Sunday, he had come back to speak to Khrushchev again because he thought he ought to know that this matter of rights of access was a most vital matter to the U. S. The President said that he thought Khrushchev would indeed probably sign a Peace Treaty, and we would then say simply we do not accept it.

Senator Saltonstall asked whether Macmillan and the British were as strong as de Gaulle on this question.



Senator Russell asked how long we have to decide. The President said we would answer the aide memoire which had much superficial attractiveness. We must get our own position clear on the rights of the people of West Berlin to be free. Then he thought the matter would go along until after the German elections.

Senator Saltonstall asked if Khrushchev seemed confident. The President answered that he thought Khrushchev probably had a knife in himself a little on this one. Not all the advantages are on his side. He will have to initiate the blockade, and it will not be easy for him to give the appearance of right on his side.

Senator Dirksen asked if the Germans were all out of Austria now. The President said yes.

Senator Humphrey said that the danger in a peace treaty is that Khrushchev can disclaim responsibility so that in the event of an incident -- if, for example, we should have to shoot down Germans -- he would be peacefully out of it, and we would be appearing to start warlike action.

The President said we should continue to hold the Russians responsible. We have to show them that there is a very serious chance that this could lead to war.

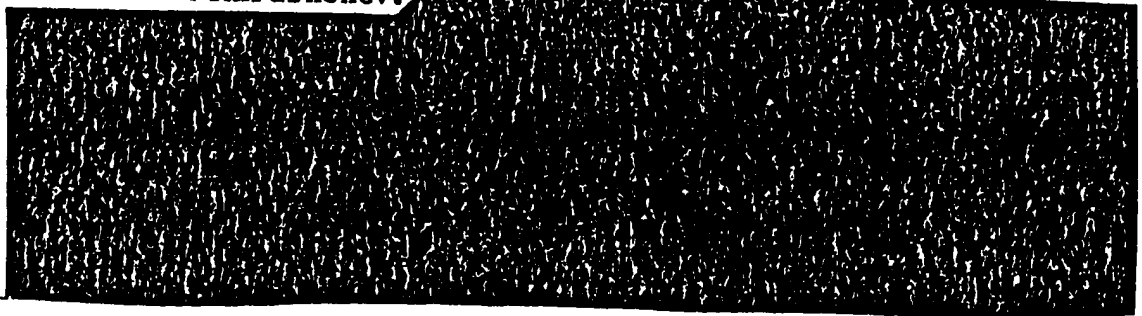
Senator Dirksen said that this was the one place where Lucius Clay fumbled -- we had no easement -- we had to go to an airlift. There followed some discussion of how a country lawyer would handle the matter.

The President asked Senator Russell what the U. S. should do if after a peace treaty the East Germans should deny access. Senator Russell said this was a big decision. He believed that if we are firm, it would not come to that point. He asked whether a Free City could be absolutely free and independent of the GDR.

Senator Dirksen asked what the timetable was. The President said we ought not to indicate. Senator Dirksen said the leadership ought to have time to puzzle over it a couple of weeks and then give its views to the President. The President said this was all right, since all we needed now was to send back an aide memoire stating our own position.

The Vice President asked if it was not fair to state that Khrushchev's position as stated to the President was as it has always been, while the President in turn had restated our position.

Congressman McCormack asked for the President's basic impression of the man Khrushchev.



[REDACTED]

On Laos, the President had asked Khrushchev how we could talk on any matter if we could not agree on Laos.

The President said that in his speech he would give no sense of a time limit, that what he would try to communicate was how the Soviets were planning to operate with patience from their inside lines, hoping to pick up countries which would tumble from interior weakness.

[REDACTED]

The President discussed privately with Senator Fulbright a call to the UAR Ambassador.

Senator Dirksen asked about public comment. After some discussion, there seemed to be agreement with the Speaker's view that all concerned would simply say that the President had given a preview of what he was going to say that evening. The Vice President summarized his sense of the Vienna meeting by saying that "he expressed his view and we re-expressed ours." The President agreed, and there was further agreement that we should say nothing that would seem to put Khrushchev in a corner where he must fight back.

Senator Humphrey suggested that the President might presently stress the notion of reunification of Germany -- our strong point in the argument.